

WARNING!

The views expressed in FMSO publications and reports are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

Infiltration Operations Continue Into Tajikistan

**LTC John E. Sray, U.S. Army
Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KS.
January 1994**

Although severe winter weather has reduced the scale and intensity of combat operations along the mountainous Tajik-Afghan border, infiltrations by the Tajik Islamist opposition based in Afghanistan continue. Russian and Tajik intelligence reports also indicate that the rebels are concentrating forces in several northern provinces of Afghanistan where training camps prepare volunteers for future covert missions. The Islamic insurgents claim to be strengthening their positions for a new spring offensive and once again are hinting that they have acquired advanced weapons "characterized by a substantial destructive capability" (i.e. Stinger and Milan). They insist that aid from the Afghan military has ceased due to the internecine fighting occurring among their supporters, but their public appeals for more help from Arab and other Islamic states (Iran) has attracted the attention of the Russian government and media.

Russian and Tajik forces, backed by artillery and combat aircraft, failed to dislodge the rebels from their positions on both sides of the border prior to the onset of winter. Now, the two governments realize that they must defeat the insurgents prior to spring when the opening of the snow-covered mountain passes could allow the rebels to receive substantial reinforcements from northeastern Afghanistan and launch a new offensive to regain territory. Despite the opposition's renewed threats of having acquired sophisticated weapons, they probably remain poorly armed. Their previous claims (as well as those of the Russian military) that stinger missiles had been introduced into the region consistently have proven false. Aircraft apparently continue to operate with impunity; and reportedly, Islamic fighters frequently fail to engage government armor due to a lack of RPGs. Nonetheless, the insurgents pose a serious threat to Tajikistan's stability and a protracted guerrilla war remains likely.